

**Thomas Jefferson to Elbridge Gerry, May 13, 1797,
Draft and Fragment, The Works of Thomas Jefferson in
Twelve Volumes. Federal Edition. Collected and Edited
by Paul Leicester Ford.**

TO ELBRIDGE GERRY J. MSS.

Philadelphia, May 13, 97.

My Dear Friend, —Your favor of the 4th instt came to hand yesterday. That of the 4th of Apr, with the one for Monroe, has never been received. The first, of Mar 27, did not reach me till Apr 21, when I was within a few days of setting out for this place, & I put off acknoleging it till I should come here. I entirely commend your dispositions towards mr. Adams; knowing his worth as intimately and esteeming it as much as any one, and acknoleging the preference of his claims, if any I could have had, to the high office conferred on him. But in truth, I had neither claims nor wishes on the subject, tho I know it will be difficult to obtain belief of this. When I retired from this place & the office of Secy of state, it was in the firmest contemplation of never more returning here. There had indeed been suggestions in the public papers, that I was looking towards a succession to the President's chair, but feeling a consciousness of their falsehood, and observing that the suggestions came from hostile quarters, I considered them as intended merely to excite public odium against me. I never in my life exchanged a word with any person, on the subject, till I found my name brought forward generally, in competition with that of mr. Adams. Those with whom I then communicated, could say, if it were necessary, whether I met the call with desire, or even with a ready acquiescence, and whether from the moment of my first acquiescence, I did not devoutly pray that the very thing might happen which

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has happened. The second office of this government is honorable & easy, the first is but a splendid misery.

You express apprehensions that stratagems will be used, to produce a misunderstanding between the President and myself. Tho not a word having this tendency has ever been hazarded to me by any one, yet I consider as a certainty that nothing will be left untried to alienate him from me. These machinations will proceed from the Hamiltons by whom he is surrounded, and who are only a little less hostile to him than to me. It cannot but damp the pleasure of cordiality, when we suspect that it is suspected. I cannot help fearing, that it is impossible for mr. Adams to believe that the state of my mind is what it really is; that he may think I view him as an obstacle in my way. I have no supernatural power to impress truth on the mind of another, nor he any to discover that the estimate which he may form, on a

just view of the human mind as generally constituted, may not be just in its application to a special constitution. This may be a source of private uneasiness to us; I honestly confess that it is so to me at this time. But neither of us are capable of letting it have effect on our public duties. Those who may endeavor to separate us, are probably excited by the fear that I might have influence on the executive councils; but when they shall know that I consider my office as constitutionally confined to legislative functions, and that I could not take any part whatever in executive consultations, even were it proposed, their fears may perhaps subside, & their object be found not worth a machination.

I do sincerely wish with you, that we could take our stand on a ground perfectly neutral & independent towards all nations. It has been my constant object thro public life; and with respect to the English & French, particularly, I have too often expressed to the former my wishes, & made to them propositions verbally & in writing, officially & privately, to official & private characters, for them to doubt of my views, if they would be content with equality. Of this they are in possession of several written & formal proofs, in my own hand writing. But they have wished a monopoly of commerce & influence with us; and they have in

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fact obtained it. When we take notice that theirs is the workshop to which we go for all we want; that with them centre either immediately or ultimately all the labors of our hands and lands; that to them belongs either openly or secretly the great mass of our navigation; that even the factorage of their affairs here, is kept to themselves by factitious citizenships; that these foreign & false citizens now constitute the great body of what are called our merchants, fill our sea ports, are planted in every little town & district of the interior country, sway everything in the former places by their own votes, & those of their dependants, in the latter, by their insinuations & the influence of their ledgers; that they are advancing fast to a monopoly of our banks & public funds, and thereby placing our public finances under their control; that they have in their alliance the most influential characters in & out of office; when they have shewn that by all these bearings on the different branches of the government, they can force it to proceed in whatever direction they dictate, and bend the interests of this country entirely to the will of another; when all this, I say, is attended to, it is impossible for us to say we stand on independent ground, impossible for a free mind not to see & to groan under the bondage in which it is bound. If anything after this could excite surprise, it would be that they have been able so far to throw dust in the eyes of our own citizens, as to fix on those who wish merely to recover self-government the charge of subserving one foreign influence, because they resist submission to another. But they possess our printing presses, a powerful engine in their government of us. At this very moment, they would have drawn us into a war on the side of England, had it not been for the failure of her bank. Such was their open & loud cry, & that of their gazettes till this event. After plunging us in all the broils of the European nations, there would remain but one act to close our tragedy, that is, to break up our Union; and even this they have ventured seriously & solemnly to propose & maintain by arguments in a Connecticut paper. I have been happy, however, in believing, from the stifling of this effort, that that dose was found too strong, & excited as much repugnance there as it did horror in other parts of our country, & that whatever follies we may be led into as to foreign nations, we shall never give up our Union, the last anchor of our hope, & that alone which is to prevent this heavenly country from becoming an arena of gladiators. Much as I abhor war, and

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view it as the greatest scourge of mankind, and anxiously as I wish to keep out of the broils of Europe, I would yet go with my brethren into these, rather than separate from them. But I hope we may still keep clear of them, notwithstanding our present thralldom, & that time may be given us to reflect on the awful crisis we have passed through, and to find some means of shielding ourselves in future from foreign influence, political, commercial, or in whatever other form it may be attempted. I can scarcely withhold myself from joining in the wish of Silas Deane, that there were an ocean of fire between us & the old world.¹

¹ The following is the last paragraph in the draft of this letter, afterwards stricken out and changed as in the print:

“I shall never forget the prediction of the count de Vergennes that we shall exhibit the singular phenomenon of a fruit rotten before it is ripe, nor cease to join in the wish of Silas Deane that there were an ocean of fire between us & the old world. Indeed my dear friend I am so disgusted with this entire subjection to a foreign power that if it were in the end to appear to be the wish of the body of my countrymen to remain in that vassalege I should feel my unfitness to be an agent in their affairs, and seek in retirement that personal independence without which this world has nothing I value. I am confident you set the same store by it which I do: but perhaps your situation may not give you the same conviction of its existence.”

A perfect confidence that you are as much attached to peace & union as myself, that you equally prize independence of all nations, and the blessings of self-government, has induced me freely to unbosom myself to you, and let you see the light in which I have viewed what has been passing among us from the beginning of the war. And I shall be happy, at all times, in an intercommunication of sentiments with you, believing that the dispositions of the different parts of our country have been considerably misrepresented & misunderstood in each part, as to the other, and that nothing but good can result from an exchange of information & opinions between those whose circumstances & morals admit no doubt of the integrity of their views.

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I remain, with constant and sincere esteem, Dear Sir, your affectionate friend and servant.